

L'Arche Kent Christmas 2011



Advent Celebration !

The community held its Advent Celebration at St. Dunstan's last Saturday (10th Dec) where in the hall behind the church there was standing room only as around 100 members and supporters of the community attended this popular annual event.

The celebration is an occasion where all members of the community present offerings of dance, mime and drama on a Christmas theme interspersed with plenty of carols led by our musicians.

Faith House got us off to a great start with a 'Ding Dong Merrily on High' rap followed by imaginative nativity dramas from Cana and Little Ewell and a Makaton 'White Christmas' from Rainbow that Bing himself would have been proud of—with snow! The rather strange 'Mr

Bluster' compared the event and generated a good deal of laughter, and a little anxiety, with his water squirting bird, Squawk, and

his rubber mouse, squeak, that exploded to both the laughter and horror of the audience during Mr Bluster's rendition of 'the night before Christmas'. The show finished with a thoughtful nativity and song before the mince pies and mulled wine were enjoyed by all with plenty of

time to catch up with a chat with friends old and new. One of the audience said, 'this helps me to remember what Christmas is really about, people being with each other and having fun'.



Henri Nouwen waitingan Advent theme

'To wait open-endedly is an enormously radical attitude toward life. So is to trust that something will happen to us that is far beyond our imaginings. So, too, is giving up control over our future and letting God define our life, trusting that God moulds us according to God's love and not according to our fear. The spiritual life is a life in which we wait, actively present to the moment, trusting that new things will happen to us, new things that are far beyond our own imagination, fantasy, or prediction. That, indeed, is a very radical stance toward life in a world preoccupied with control.

Henri J. M. Nouwen'



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Improved web site
recently?

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'Let's not pretend that community life is not demanding'

an extract from Jean Vanier's September newsletter

'Our type of community with people who have been pushed to the edge seems to inspire new forms of community. In France today, small communities are being created with people on the streets, with people with other kinds of disability or with psychiatric illness. Isolation is a contributing factor to anguish; being together, even allowing for all the built in relationship pitfalls, is a source of joy and security. A man of the street once told me, "Social services want to give me an apartment, but living on my own would be simply appalling." These new communities naturally need leaders who can encourage the shared life to hatch, someone able to animate the meals and celebrations, as well as the meetings called for when the inevitable conflicts crop up.

What is new in these different forms of community, is that they are a source of healing both for the marginalised people they welcome, and also for those who live with them. These are not just do-gooders, performing works of charity to others but helpers who are healed by a life of relationships that are simple and loving. In the gentle business of loving and of working for justice and peace, they find their place of

growth.

The prophet Isaiah had already announced, (58.7-8): *"if you share your bread with the hungry, give shelter to the homeless, if you see a naked man and cloth him, while not neglecting your own kith and kin, then will your light shine out like the dawn, and your wound be quickly healed over, and your justice will go before you, and the Glory of God behind you."*

The presence of those who feel bereft and on the margins cry out, and their cry for friendship transforms us. They awaken our love and our light. Of course, this life is demanding and can drive us up the wall!, but God knows it is worth it. Jesus is truly here, hidden in the poor, the vulnerable and the weak (Mt. 25), present even when unrecognised: whatever we are doing for the least of people, we are doing for Jesus. Community life then becomes a source of life and of unity between people who are truly different, and who live their human and

spiritual pathways on very different levels.



Let's not pretend that community life is not demanding, reducing our time for prayer and for deepening our interior life. The times of relaxation and renewal that we need are hard to come by. Pretty soon, we can be more taken up by what appears to be "work" than by "brotherly fellowship." Etty Hillesum, of whom I have often spoken in my letters, sought to bring into harmony the union with God and love and compassion for others, above all in Westerbork camp where she endeavoured to be a light and a support for the thousands of Jews crammed inside a world of suffering. She writes: *"There is a very deep well in me. And in this well, there is God. Every now and then, I manage to reach him. But more often than not, God is buried under the stones and rub-*

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This brief Christmas Newsletter will be followed by our Winter Newsletter in February. Please send any comments or articles for consideration to colin.bridgland@larchkent.org.uk

What's Happening?

January 19th 2.30 pm Community Gathering at Eythorne Baptist Hall

February 17th 3.30pm Community Gathering St Dunstans Hall. Canterbury

Taize Prayer every first (1st) Tuesday of the month in Rainbow at 6:00pm

Taize Prayer every first (1st) Friday of the month in Little Ewell at 12:30pm



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ble that block the well. So we are obliged to seek him in our very depths, behind all the blockages." She speaks of being in the arms of God and of listening to "the small inner voice," which calls her to stop and wait in God's presence. Isn't this the same little voice as the one proclaimed in the book of Revelation, where God says, "Behold, I am standing at the door and knocking; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to his house and eat with him, side by side" (Rev. 3.20)? To share a meal with the Lord is to become his friend, to become good and compassionate like him.

Special Gifts

Ruth shares the beginning of her journey as an assistant at Cana in Eythorne

"I have just completed two months at Cana House and was thinking back to 25th September when I came to L'Arche, Kent. When I woke up that morning I read some words from one of my husband's journals. (He died 14 months before) He had written a quote from a meditation by Henri Nouwen on Revelation Chapter 21 where he says 'We need to learn to live each moment as a new beginning not allowing the past to rob us of all God has for the future'. He continues 'I have a gift for you and I can't wait for you to see it'. For me

that was very special as if my husband was there encouraging me as I went to L'Arche.

So over these couple of months I have begun unwrapping the gifts that God so generously wants to give me at L'Arche.

At first it was hard to recognise the gifts as I embarked on a new life after teaching for 25 years, I missed my home in London, my son, my friends and the familiarity of my work. I struggled with sleepless nights and knowing I couldn't go to a peaceful home at the end of the day. But slowly I have begun to unwrap the special gifts that living at L'Arche brings love, acceptance, joy, friendships, a chance to live life unfettered by many of my possessions, the incredible privilege of living in community, the deep internal and spiritual lessons that God wants to

teach me at L'Arche, the joy of living life with people from so many different places, eating wonderful food, walking in the beautiful countryside, the training and mentoring I have received and lots more.... So many gifts and many I have probably not understood or recognised.

I have begun to open the gifts but I know there will be more to open in my remaining time at Cana. I know that we all have gifts to open here and so many have lived a long time at L'Arche and have opened many and I am just at the very beginning of my life here. I thank God for this new beginning."



Congratulations! Claudia & Bogdan assistants at Cana and Little Ewell who were married in October in Romania and had another party in the UK to celebrate with their friends



Welcome to Paul !

Paul joined the community early in December and is living at Spring.



We need an Editor

We are planning to put out our newsletter 4 times a year and would love to share this task with someone who has the time and skills to put it together. Contact Colin if you think this could be you!
colin.bridgland@larchkent.org.uk

L'Arche Kent Choir

We have started our own Choir! If you would like to get involved please contact Mirjam at Faith House or call the number at the foot of page 4. Enthusiasm is all you need to join.



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Remembering John Boorman 9th April 1929 - 11th October 2011

Personal views by 3 community members

"I cried the first time John let me wash his feet. It turned out to be the last time as well and I think that part of me knew that. As I was holding his wrinkled and aged feet in my hands, I imagined all the steps those feet had walked and now here we were, me kneeling at his feet. I felt something of the sacred as I gently scrubbed them clean. I felt privileged, honoured to know such a man and to be trusted to touch him. I took my time. I lingered. I wept. John did not seem to mind. Sometimes, as humans, we connect."

Laurie

"Although he lived 82 years he never allowed other people to think about him as an old man; I have met Jean Vanier couple of weeks ago and I just thought; 'great men are alike'. John was able to be present for other person like only truly holy people can; he could enjoy things and be amused by them as he was still a child. He was also a determined man. If he thought that there is right way of going about things he stuck to it with an iron will. I had to convince John in his last year of life to many things which he didn't approve of. Countless medications, examinations, applications of ointments in all sort of places. He was very sceptical and reluctant about the whole process. I hated it with all my heart to observe how John was accepting the decline of his physical strength. He cried when he realised that the zimmer frame the physiotherapist brought was for him. I feel so privilege by being part of his struggle. I feel John decided to die and with determination typical for himself did die. He didn't want to cling to life as an old man. He always was doing things his way".

Gosia



John was born in 1929 in Dover, and having lived from the age of 11 in large institutions he came in January 1974 with Bill and David to live in the new L'Arche house, Little Ewell. I first got to know John when I moved to Cana in 1989 a few months after John had founded the house with Melanie, Janet, Cathy and Gerry. I liked John from the start. He was a great character, and somebody who liked to do things his way and at his pace. We became good friends and on my wedding day it was John who I chose to accompany me into the church and down the aisle! He remained an important person in my life and in that of my family.

John could get very cross in some situations but he was also a man of great sensitivity and tenderness. There were many occasions when he would give a little flower or other gift to somebody just when they needed it. John knew intuitively who it was who needed to be touched. And he was a man with a deep faith and an innate sense of the sacred. When I first knew him he would say long prayers, starting with the people he was closest to and working outwards so that it seemed that the whole world was being prayed for. He went for many years to the Anglican church in Eythorne but more recently began attending the Baptist church. I asked him why he had started going there and he said "you don't have to pay!" I think it also had to do with the more lively music and the presence of children in the congregation. John loved children.

For me there was something of the priest about John. He would often stand up in a community gathering and bless everyone, sometimes turning to people in each direction, North, South, East and West, which is an ancient Celtic type of blessing. And when you were blessed by John you felt truly blessed.

John continued to go to the Garden at Little Ewell until well into his 70s. Then at a certain point he decided to stay at home and his first words of the day would be "not going anywhere today". But he was surrounded in Cana by lovely, adoring women and what 82 year old man could ask for more. And who could ask for a greater level of care for their friend. I was lucky that John still came with me sometimes to the Sportsman's Café in Canterbury. When we entered he would go up to the biggest, most tattooed blokes there and shake their hands and say "I've seen you before" and when we left he would turn round in the doorway and bless everybody in the café.

One of the last things I did with John was to inaugurate the new path we made into the Cana garden. The path was made for John mainly but he complained that it wasn't right and I don't think he ever walked on it again! Cana gave me afterwards a Thank you card with a photo of John and I on the path and I will treasure that card.

On the day that John died I was asked by somebody who hadn't known him if he had lived a good life. Thinking about that, if the measure of a good life is how many hearts were touched, how many lives enriched, how many people blessed, and the depth of sadness felt at the person's absence, then yes, John lived a very good life.

And so dear John, for you and for your life 'Lord God we thank you. Amen'.

Eddie